

Coalition of Innovating Congregations

A quarterly newsletter

Success Stories: What Will You Take As Evidence?

5770 February 2010 • Volume 1, Issue 4

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The Coalition of Innovating Congregations Noticing, Measuring and Highlighting Success

How do you know when Jewish learning is successful?
What will you take as evidence that congregational learning is effective?

The Coalition of Innovating Congregations is not shying away from these questions. Professional and lay leaders take their roles as assessors very seriously. They are devoting significant effort to noticing, measuring and highlighting the success in learners' lives that results from engagement with Jewish educational experiences.

This hasn't been easy. Prior to the work of the Coalition, little had been done to assess "whole-person learning" in the congregational setting. Assessing more than what a child knows or what a child likes requires leaders to develop new tools and skills.

Effective assessment also takes a team committed to noticing, measuring and highlighting success. The stories in this issue demonstrate how parents, directors of education, clergy, teachers and students are shaping cultures of accountability. Innovating congregations are developing feedback loops where data informs next bold steps. Vision and data combined make a powerful force for innovation.

Temple Israel Center

▶▶▶ PARENTS NOTICING, MEASURING AND HIGHLIGHTING SUCCESS

Kvell is defined in the Miriam-Webster dictionary as "to be extraordinarily proud; rejoice." On the other hand, the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "feeling happy and proud." Has something been lost in translation?

No translation is needed for parents who witness their children learning and living a sweet and joyous Jewish life. Temple Israel Center (TIC) of White Plains knows that parents naturally pay attention to the special moments in their children's lives. So it made perfect sense for the congregation to ask parents to take on the task of officially noticing, measuring and highlighting their children's Jewish journeys. This past September, each parent of a child in the kindergarten class was given a scrapbook to capture the stories, photos and memories of their children's Jewish living.

"Our goal at TIC," says Nancy Parkes, the Director of Education, "is for children to be 'inspired to bring their learning into daily life.'" The challenge, she notes, is that teachers aren't able to know if the learning is actually moving beyond the class into a child's daily routine. So parents were enlisted as partners in measuring success.

On the first day of learning, each kindergarten child received a Teddy Bear with a *kippah* meant to be company during Jewish experiences. In addition to just being fun, the bears also help parents highlight special Jewish times.

"... parents naturally pay attention to the special moments in their children's lives."

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Michael and Steven, six year old twin brothers, named their bears "Brighty" and "Teddy." The first story to be placed in their scrapbook was about *Rosh Hashanah* at Grandma's house. Grandma, a natural *kveller*, had the table set with round challah, candlesticks, honey and apples.

"Bears love honey," called out one brother, while the other brother cautioned "sticky bears" are not a good idea. So the bears sat on the side watching Michael and Steven join their family in dipping, eating and celebrating. Joyous Jewish living remembered.

The scrapbook also includes the twins and their bears helping mend the world. Brighty, Teddy, Michael and Steven supported the synagogue's food drive. Their scrapbook captured the adventure of the boys and their bears shopping for cans of food to donate. "Helping feed those in need is a *mitzvah*," explains the twins' mother. "Part of being Jewish is helping people in need." The bears joined the family in delivering cans to a shelter. Recently, the twins brought the bears to synagogue dressed in costume for Purim. These moments won't be forgotten. The twins have a record of actively living Jewish lives of purpose at a very young age. "Now," says the twins' mother, "the boys often ask, 'Is what we are doing a Jewish thing?'"

Michael and Steven have a record of special Jewish moments. Their teachers are delighted to discover the way learning supports children on their Jewish journeys. And the twin's parents are having many opportunities to *kvell* — really *kvell*.



*Worth Remembering:
Teddy Bears for the Jewish Journey*

*Temple Israel Center of White Plains
Kindergarten Students*

NOTICING, MEASURING AND HIGHLIGHTING SUCCESS **OUR TRADITION TEACHES: AT FIRST IT "COMES ON LITTLE BY LITTLE, THEN...."**

"Who is she who looks like the dawn?" (Song of Songs 6:10)

It is related that Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Simeon ben Halafta were once walking in the valley of Arbel in the early morning, and as they saw the dawn coming up, Rabbi Hiyya Rabbah said to Rabbi Simeon ben Halafta: "This is how the redemption of Israel will emerge, as it is written, 'Though I sit in darkness, God is my light'" (Micah 7:8)

At first [redemption] comes on little by little, then it begins to sparkle, then it gathers strength, and spreads over the sky. (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 6:25)

Community Synagogue of Rye

► ► ► CLERGY NOTICING AND HIGHLIGHTING SUCCESS

Synagogues can be messy places. Events, people and the calendar move just slightly slower than the speed of light. In such a whirlwind, a visionary leader helps make coherence and meaning. Stories of success in the lives of learners are one way leaders knit together a cultural tapestry that expresses the hopes and dreams of the congregation. The stories they tell focus attention on what the congregation values and strives to accomplish.

Effective leaders notice and highlight the moments when vision is not a distant picture, but a present reality. Rabbi Daniel Gropper of Community Synagogue of Rye (CSR) is one of those leaders who is helping his congregation shape a new picture of education by elevating the life-changing stories of congregants. As their vision says, "We aspire to provide a welcoming environment that invites people to embrace and explore Judaism in a dynamic and supportive atmosphere."

Sharon and her family, according to Rabbi Gropper, are active members in the congregation. They joyously live in the rhythm of Jewish life. But this wasn't true when Sharon joined the temple a few years ago. Sharon signed up because it was time for her oldest child to have his bar mitzvah. Sharon recalls satisfaction at being the carpool mom. She confessed to Rabbi Gropper that, although she had been in USY and Hillel in her younger years, she didn't "really feel Jewish." Sharon attributed her discomfort with Jewish life to her lack of any formal Jewish learning. Inspired by Rabbi Gropper's personal invitation, Sharon joined *Ansche Binah*, an adult *b'nai mitzvah* class.

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Community Synagogue of Rye (continued)

In a short period of time, she went from being the reluctant participant to the excited student. The welcoming atmosphere that CSR aspires to and creates opened the gates of learning and friendship for Sharon. Hebrew and Israel were part of her learning. In addition to the curriculum, Sharon's family joined the synagogue's trip to Israel.

As Sharon prepared to read from the Torah for her own adult *bat mitzvah*, her son began to study to read from the Torah. Mother and son arranged to read from the Torah on the same Shabbat. Newly confident in her Jewish learning, Sharon tutored her own son to read his portion.

Rabbi Gropper highlights Sharon's story as one example of many adults at Community Synagogue of Rye who have deepened their connection to Jewish life and learning. In recalling Sharon's journey, Rabbi Gropper notes the impact that parents' journeys have on their children. Sharon's daughter now also attends Eisner camp.

When Rabbi Gropper tells Sharon's story he signals to the congregation, "Jewish learning in our community aspires to support life-changing journeys for parents and children. We have evidence today that our future is here."

Noticing, Measuring, & Highlighting Success:

1. **Enables Learners** to take pride in their accomplishments. "I am growing and changing in important ways," is an essential affirmation and motivation for all Jewish journeyers.
2. **Enables Teachers** to adapt their practice. "I know how to design learning effectively because I see results," is an important mantra for teachers. When identified results are not achieved, teachers can reflect and redirect.
3. **Enables Educational Leaders** to create a culture of data driven innovation. "We don't change according to whim, rather we are guided by data about how well we are reaching our vision and goals."

Temple Beth Abraham

► ► ► TEACHERS NOTICING, MEASURING AND HIGHLIGHTING SUCCESS

The Educational Leadership Team (ELT) of Temple Beth Abraham of Tarrytown, NY agreed, after much discussion, that success means: "Children will be on a spiritual journey rooted in Jewish tradition." This is a lofty goal. How can a teacher know if learning is contributing to this life goal? Indicators of success were already being observed. For example, it was evident that children participate energetically in prayer services conducted by the rabbi. The ELT was open to identifying additional indicators of success.

Teachers on the Professional Learning Team (PLT) made a commitment to develop and practice focused assessment of a child's spiritual journey. The team began with the simple question, "What will we take as evidence?" Director of Education, Pam Barkley, worked with her team to identify noticing targets. Noticing targets are observable expressions of a student's knowledge, actions, beliefs/values and sense of belonging.



Success: A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

North Shore Synagogue, Jello - Jewish Experiential Living & Learning Opportunities

Victoria Ritter, an experienced teacher with a reputation for excellence, decided that a brief questionnaire would be an effective tool for capturing her students' spiritual encounter with prayers learned. Victoria is using the tool four times with her students to capture growth and change over time. The questionnaires also allow students to reflect on their own learning. Reflection enables a student to make meaning and personalize new information.

"My lessons are much clearer when guided by the noticing targets," says Victoria. "I focus learning in a way that helps the students develop deep understanding and relationship to the prayers." This seasoned teacher says, "The noticing process seems to offer a structure or a map for each unit."

Despite years of experience Victoria says, "It's useful to try new things." Victoria was particularly moved by her students' response to the noticing process. She realizes her students are eager to explore personal spirituality more than she would have thought. She speculates that this work is providing a safe framework for students to express themselves in ways that other learning components have not. Victoria and her team are finding new kinds of evidence to demonstrate that they are supporting children on a spiritual journey rooted in Jewish tradition.



Yachdav: A LOMED gathering of over 150 lay leaders, clergy, educational directors and teachers at UJA-Federation of New York, November 15, 2009.



Saul Kaiserman, Director of Education, Congregation Emanu-El of the City of NY, facilitates Living and Learning at the Glen Cove Mansion, January 10, 2010

Teachers from multiple congregations shared results from implementing noticing targets and assessment tools. "I'm hearing what my students believe about God," said one teacher. A "God Journal" is a new tool enabling her to be in conversation with students about Jewish knowledge, action, belief and sense of belonging.

One hundred teachers from 25 congregations honed their assessment skills at the January Living and Learning Experience.

In order to provide privacy, a number of the names in the stories have been changed.

TEAMS PIONEERING ASSESSMENT

One hundred fifty lay leaders, clergy, educational directors and teachers gathered this past November at *Yachdav* to help shape *LOMED in the 21st Century*. LOMED is an acronym for the work at hand: **L**earner **O**utcomes and **M**easurement for **E**ffective educational **D**esign. Teams from 25 congregations were represented.

Clergy and lay leaders practiced the art of storytelling for success with Deborah Howard of Guiding Consulting. Cindy Reich of the Experiment in Congregational Education led educational directors and teachers in identifying noticing targets, prompts and tools to measure "whole person learning." Together these teams are pioneering assessment of Jewish learning and living for the 21st Century.

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LOMED

New York Coalition of Innovating Congregations

**Professional Learning
and Continued Innovation**

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